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# The Monthly Illustrator

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"We make no choice among the varied paths where art and letters seek for truth."

## AN ENTHUSIAST IN PAINTING

BY CHARLES WILLIAM LARNED, U.S.A.

*With original illustrations by James Carroll Beckwith.*

I FIRST met Carroll Beckwith in the spring of 1878. He had but recently returned to America from the land of his art apprenticeship, with the dew of the Elysian Fields fresh upon him and full of that exuberance of the beaux arts and the Parisian atelier.

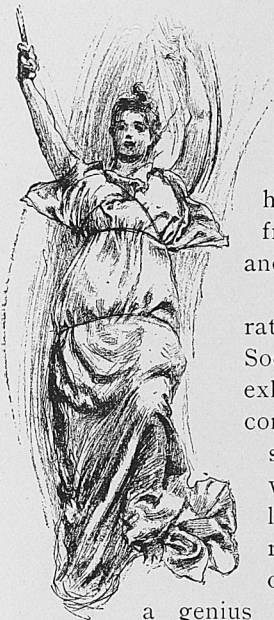
The occasion of our introduction was my expressed admiration of a sparkling little water-color at the Water Color Society. I thought it one of the best things in its way in the exhibition, and therein apparently differed from the hanging committee, who seemed to regard this airy bit of mocking

sprightliness, wafted with uplifted tambourine on a fleece of torn cloud, as

a genius altogether too vivacious for the decorous atmosphere of New York art, and so "Scherzo" smiled and tapped defiance at her critics from a lofty perch near the ceiling, and still nods a daily greeting to me from the wall of my studio.

Beckwith's personality straightway captured my heart.

I do not exactly know when or where he was born, and do not very much care — somewhere in Missouri, I believe, and about forty-three years ago — but I know that he is a very interesting personality, with some level-headed views on men, manners, and art; has a refined, artistic sensibility, with unerring good taste; an agile and appre-



A PORTRAIT SKETCH.



*Drawn by J. Carroll Beckwith.*

AN ATTITUDE OF EXPECTATION.

hensive mind, trained by travel and observation rather than by books ; and a winning and exceedingly sympathetic address. To look at, he is slight and short ; stoops a trifle in walking ; carries a well-modeled alert head, with fine eyes, a slightly aquiline irregular nose, a mobile and somewhat sensuous mouth accented by a close mustache and goatee that give a decidedly French caste to his face. On top of this put a gray thatch parted in the middle ; pepper with a few freckles and a great variety of expressions ; add a cigarette rolled with his own fingers, and you have him as I generally find him in his paint-shop. Stay—I had nearly forgotten the laugh that no portrait should omit, not even a painted one—an audacious

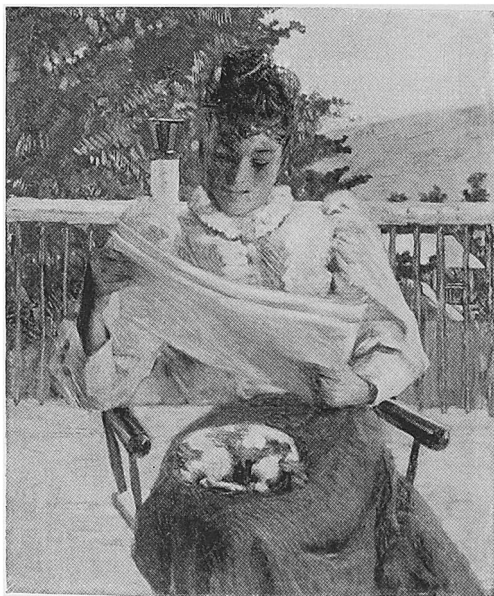
scapegrace of a laugh, that breaks through the decorum of his most intense convictions and deepest gloom and bears you off on a scamper into the land of fun.

It was when American art had matured into a somewhat prim and austere maid

of decorous mien, that an irruption of young freebooters, chiefly from the caves of the pictorial muse along the Latin Quarter of Paris, burst in upon her tranquillity. Who were these young bloods of paint, clever, audacious, unconventional, more or less conceited, vigorous, and irreconcilable ? Simply some American youth who had learnt their trade in the very best paint-shops of the world, and who, whatever else they did or did not know or do, did know how to paint and draw, and did both with a vim and abandon altogether new, delightful, and upsetting. They brought with them a revelation of the value of technical mastery in art work ; and also, they gave evidence of the enormous advantage that results from independence of vision and contempt of tradition in the contemplation of



STUDY FOR A HEAD.



THE MORNING PAPER.



nature. These young men thought at the time that they represented considerably more than this, and that their mission was to enthrone an entirely new lady of their own in place of the stiff party who had held sway on the national Parnassus for so long; but now that time has somewhat mellowed the enthusiasm of the irreconcilables of fifteen or twenty years ago, they have doubtless discovered that the modern art of painting has to be classed as a bread - and - butter science; they seem also to have accept-



DECORATIVE STUDIES.

ed as a fact that there is a latent vitality in the genius of our homely Muse that may be the germ of a new inspiration.

Beckwith was one of the leaders and enthusiasts in this invasion. He believed devoutly in "The Values," in youth, in "Art for Art's Sake," in paint, in himself and in others. He believed loyally also in his master, Carolus Duran, and drew his art ozone from the atmosphere that surrounds that Admirable Crichton, therefore his work reflects some of the merits and demerits of this versatile man. Though the glitter of Duran's brilliancy may not dazzle the judgment of the judicious, and some of his work is quite sure to make them grieve, it is easy to acknowledge the astonishing ability of the man and his power as a technician in form and color. There is a healthiness, too,



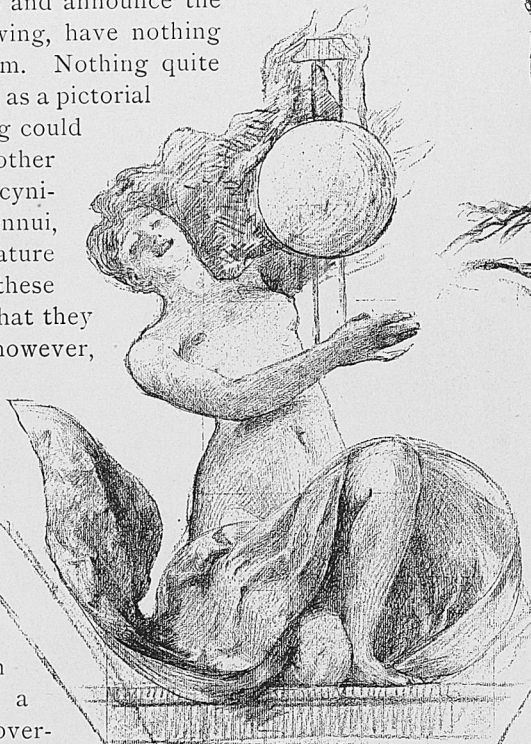
*Drawn by J. Carroll Beckwith.*

A JAUNTY PEASANT-GIRL.

in the robust realism of his style that is in sympathy with the old masters and is in pleasing contrast to all the morbidity of latter-day art—all of the one-idea tendencies foisted upon a gaping world under the name of impressionism.

Carolus Duran believes in good drawing and healthy color, and as Beckwith believes in Duran, he stands here for just these things in art. The "Decadents"

of painting—the Paul Verlaines, Mallarnies, Maeterlincks, and Ghils of formless color—who affront the intelligence of the poor Philistine world by raucus violence or ghastly marasmus in paint and announce the overthrow of drawing, have nothing in common with him. Nothing quite so solemnly absurd as a pictorial art without drawing could come from any other than an age of cynicism, paradox, and ennui, and Beckwith's nature is remote from these qualities and all that they engender. He is, however, in full sympathy with the impressionism of Manet and the truth he cried in the ness—a revolt Termini of traditional academic convention again calls forth a old fields become overwedded to its own con—that the “plein air” move-

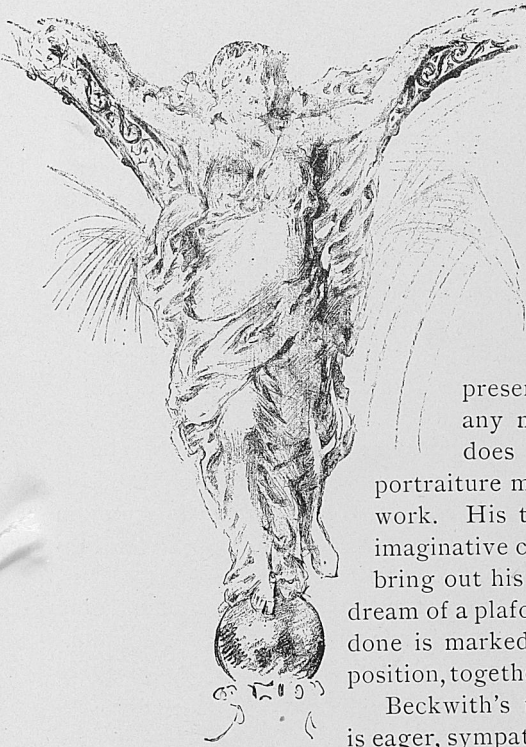


that wilder- against the tion and ac- that now and prophet when worked and art is ceits. He feels ment and new color vision mark a distinct epoch in art whose full fruit is not yet. But it is a movement and not an overthrow; it has given new light without extinguishing the old; opened a new door without closing the old gates of the temple.

His merits as a draughtsman indeed are remarkable, and one of the strong features of his quality as an artist. In grace and precision of touch he has few equals here. In charcoal his work is broad, nervous, vigorous, and brilliant; with the lead pencil, which he uses with a charm altogether his own, it is sinuous, exquisite in precision and delicacy, graceful, and firm. In his drawing his method is direct and rapid,







A DECORATIVE FIGURE IN THE  
THEATRE AT AIX-LES-BAINS.

but with a quick susceptibility of everything artistic in saint or sinner. He is too sane and practical to be affected by any cult or esoteric exaltation, but has a very loyal faith in the mission of Art, and positive convictions upon the principles of its sound development.

The practical side of his nature leads him to take an active part in the social, political, and artistic life of his beloved New York. He was one of the first members of the City Club, which has been wielded so effectively of late over the head of the Tammany Tiger; he is one of the "patrons" of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; a full member of the National Academy of Design; member of the Society of American Artists and of the American Fine Art Association; a professor in the Art Students' League, and a number of other things I have forgotten. No scheme, exhibition, or entertainment for the promotion of art but finds him prominent and active among its promoters, and in a way that always brings him new friends and admirers. Take him all in all, there is no sounder, more Catholic, or more honest activity at work in the formation of American art and art opinion than James Carroll Beckwith of New York.

but highly finished, and from first to last there is scarcely an erasure. With the point he has done but little, but that little has the mark of his ability. As a painter he has decidedly the quality of his master—a strong, solid body, brilliancy, clear, well-balanced tones, and a style that is somewhat *voyant* at times, but always masterful.

He has settled into portraiture, not altogether from preference, I think, but because it is almost inevitable under present art conditions in this country that with any man who makes painting a profession and does not possess an independent competence portraiture must form the steady business portion of his work. His taste, I make sure, would lead him toward imaginative composition, and a ceiling or wall panel would bring out his best powers. What painter that does not dream of a plafond? The work of this character that he has done is marked by great beauty of line and grace in composition, together with a characteristic vivacity of sentiment.

Beckwith's temperament is eager, sympathetic, chivalrous, and intensely human. It is quite devoid of cant,

